

Humility Code

15 Principles for Proverbs to Live By

by David Brooks, in *The Road to Character*¹

1 We don't live for happiness, we live for holiness. Life is essentially a moral drama, not a hedonistic one.

2 The long road to character begins with an accurate understanding of our nature, and the core of that understanding is that we are flawed creatures (see #3) We have an innate tendency toward selfishness and overconfidence.

3 Although we are flawed creatures, we are also splendidly endowed... We are both weak and strong, bound and free, blind and far-seeing.

4 in the struggle against your own weakness, humility is the greatest virtue. Humility is having an accurate assessment of your own nature and your own place in the cosmos.

5 Pride is the central vice... Pride blinds us to the reality of our divided nature.

6 Once the necessities for survival are satisfied, the struggle against sin and for virtue is the central drama of life... The purpose of the struggle against sin and weakness is not to "win,"...the most important thing is whether you are willing to engage in this struggle.

7 Character is built in the course of your inner confrontation. ...You become more disciplined, considerate, and loving through a thousand small acts of self-control, sharing, service, friendship, and refined enjoyment.

8 The things that lead us astray are short term. ...The things we call character endure over the long term. ...People with character. . .are anchored by permanent attachments to important things... they have a permanent commitment to tasks that cannot be completed in a single lifetime.

9 No person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own. ... Everybody needs redemptive assistance from outside—from God, family, friends, ancestors, rules, traditions, institutions, and exemplars. ...We wage our struggles in conjunction with others waging theirs, and the boundaries between us are indistinct.

10 We are all ultimately saved by grace. You don't flail about in desperation, because hands are holding you up. You don't have to struggle for a place, because you are embraced and accepted.

11 Defeating weakness often means quieting the self. . .muting the sound of your own ego. . .

¹ This summary was found at <http://www.forestparkreview.com/Community/Blogs/8-30-2015/David-Brooks'-Humility-Code/>. You can find the full version of this in Brooks' book, pp 261ff.

The struggle against weakness thus requires the habits of self-effacement—reticence, modesty, obedience to some larger thing—and a capacity for reverence and admiration.

12 Wisdom starts with epistemological modesty. Over the centuries, our ancestors built up a general bank of practical wisdom, traditions, habits, manners, moral sentiments, and practices. The humble person thus has an acute historical consciousness.

13 No good life is possible unless it is organized around a vocation. ...A vocation is not found by looking within and finding your passion. It is found by looking without and asking what life is asking of us.

14 The best leader tries to lead along the grain of human nature rather than go against it. ...the wise leader is a steward for his organization and tries to pass it along in slightly better condition than he found it.

15 The person who successfully struggles against weakness and sin may or may not become rich and famous, but that person will become mature... That person has said a multitude of noes for the sake of a few overwhelming yeses.